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SUBJECT: EU REPRESENTATIVE PETER SEMNEBY COMMENTS ON HIS
MEETING WITH AZERBAIJANI PRESIDENT ALIYEV

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: EU Special Representative Peter Semneby reviewed his October 18 meeting with President Aliyev with the Ambassador on the same day. Aliyev told Semneby there was no agreement at the Caspian Heads of State meeting in Tehran. During the Caspian Summit, Turkmen President Berdimuhamedov privately told Aliyev he supported a trans-Caspian gas pipeline, although Berdimuhamedov could not make this public. On EU concern about Azerbaijan's democratic track record, Aliyev complained that the EU unfairly singles out Azerbaijan for criticism. Aliyev was downbeat on the prospects for a settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict until after Azerbaijan and Armenia's respective election cycles are finished in 2009. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador met with EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus Peter Semneby on October 18. Semneby was accompanied by several other EU officers: Mark Fawcett, Alexandros Yannis, and Gael Guichard. The EU officers provided the Ambassador with a readout of their meeting that same day with President Ilham Aliyev. The officials also met with human rights activists and Minister of Internal Affairs Ramil Usubov. Semneby remarked that his meeting with Usubov was not very productive.

Caspian Summit Tidbits

¶3. (C) According to Semneby, Aliyev's key point about the Caspian Heads of State summit in Tehran was that there was no agreement among the heads of state on the division of the Caspian. Aliyev appeared comfortable that Azerbaijan did not make any concessions during the summit. During the summit, Putin insisted on the principle of collective consensus regarding any potential pipeline.

¶4. (C) Aliyev told Semneby that during the Caspian summit, Turkmen President Berdimuhamedov privately told Aliyev that he supported a trans-Caspian gas pipeline. "Although we can't call it a TCP, just an interconnector." Berdimuhamedov said he could not make this position public, however. Aliyev told Semneby he was impatient with Turkmenistan's position. Semneby observed that Aliyev feels very self-confident about Azerbaijan's importance to the EU, but Aliyev also appears somewhat "nervous" about the prospects for a trans-Caspian pipeline and cooperation with Turkmenistan. Aliyev commented that he cannot wait forever and this needs to be settled in

the next few months as the issue draws attention to Azerbaijan.

¶5. (C) On Iran, Aliyev told Semneby that Iran feels confident that it will not be diplomatically isolated and will be able to avoid new UN sanctions because of Russia and China's support in the UN Security Council.

Aliyev Complains about EU Double Standards

¶6. (C) Semneby told the Ambassador that in response to Semneby raising concerns about Azerbaijan's democratic track record, Aliyev countered sharply by arguing that the EU has a double standard for Azerbaijan. Aliyev suggested that the EU and the West only focus on Azerbaijan's problems, whereas the EU and the West refrain from criticizing Georgia and Ukraine's internal reform challenges.

¶7. (C) Aliyev argued that Azerbaijan needs more time to implement reform, while reaffirming Azerbaijan's path toward the West. Aliyev said Azerbaijan's "modernization goes through Europe" and "Europe is our future." On Azerbaijan's reform track record, Semneby and Yannis said that Aliyev fails to grasp the importance of building sustainable democratic institutions. Semneby's colleagues, who met Aliyev for the first time, echoed the view of many of his western interlocutors that he is confident, articulate, and impressive in his command of detail on the issues and his overall strategic vision.

Aliyev Skeptical about NK Solution

BAKU 00001284 002 OF 002

¶8. (C) Aliyev was downbeat on the prospects for an NK settlement, according to Semneby, suggesting there was little hope for a near-term solution. Aliyev claimed that Azerbaijan had offered a flexible position, while suggesting that progress was unlikely until after Azerbaijan and Armenia's respective election cycles were complete in 2009. Aliyev also played to the usual themes of time being on Azerbaijan's side because of Azerbaijan's growing economic and military might, warning that Azerbaijan's position with Armenia may be less flexible in 2009. Aliyev said he did not care if there was no settlement before 2009. Yannis interpreted Aliyev's comments on Armenia and the NK conflict as an attempt to probe the EU for a response to this tougher Azerbaijani position.
DERSE